

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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AUGUST 7th, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

You will remember that the leading idea of the Supplement to C.N.-L. No. 29 was that the social and international order which it will be possible to create after the war depends on what we do now during the war. There is no point at which that future is more dependent on present action than the provision that is made now for the training of youth.

The issue is one in which the needs of education and the requirements of the war tend to coalesce. From the military and political point of view nothing would have a greater effect both on German and on neutral opinion than evidence of this country's determination to seize the future by a far-reaching plan for developing the physical and spiritual vigour of the coming generation. From the educational standpoint there is a magnificent opportunity of getting out of ruts, broadening the whole educational outlook and taking a leap into a bigger future.

Some of the issues were raised in the debate in the House of Lords on July 17th. The essential thing is that what is done should be sufficiently imaginative and bold in its conception. Only by this means can it have the desired political effect. It is equally necessary that it should be more than a war-time improvisation and should be conceived on broad lines as a permanent enrichment of the national provision for education. The issues, political and educational, are big enough to justify the setting up of a new ministry; or at least the appointment of a Commissioner of Youth with full powers, responsible directly to the Prime Minister.

In the issue of *The Times Educational Supplement* of July 27th (4d. post free)—which is devoted in the main to the subject of the welfare of young workers and which deals with many aspects of it that there is no room to mention here—it is urged that the national youth movement initiated last year is “in danger of perishing for lack of leadership ere another winter be past, unless new vigour and something of speed be injected into it. Of the imminence of that injection there is as yet little sign.”

There is, of course, a real danger that in the context of the war and, still more, of the false values widely prevalent in our present society, the scheme might take on a Fascist shape. But the risk is no less real that through timidity and hesitation we may throw away the chance of removing a cruel disability from the life of our youth.

The true lines of advance are marked out by the County Badge Scheme referred to in C.N.-L. No. 38. If the ideas of those who have worked this scheme are embodied in the national programme the essential matters will be secured.

YOUTH AND RELIGION

The vital question is, Will the country awake? It is a happy chance that next Sunday thought will be concentrated on the place of youth in the national life. At the suggestion of the national juvenile organisations, members of these organisations

have been invited by the leaders of the Churches to attend the churches to which they belong next Sunday and join in special services of intercession and dedication to the service of God and of the country. Can we all pray with one heart and mind that the youth of the nation may be given its chance?

A good deal of concern has been felt by the Youth Departments of the Churches lest the importance of religion in the training of youth should be overlooked. They have been dissatisfied in particular with the lack of recognition of the spiritual factor in the recent circular 1516 of the Board of Education mentioned in C.N.-L. No. 37. Representations on the subject have been made to the Board of Education.

Without religious inspiration no movement of youth can come to full life. But those of us who believe this cannot too often remind ourselves that in religious education it is not only the truth that is preached or taught that matters but the sense in which that truth is assimilated by the hearers. In a society that has a wrong scale of values religious teaching inevitably becomes distorted. It cannot escape being misinterpreted through the false values in the minds of those who receive it. Efforts to create a healthier natural and social environment for youth may thus be serving the cause of religion even when there is no explicit recognition of it; they may be preparing the soil in which a healthy religious life can grow.

This, of course, is not enough. But religiously it may, as a preparatory work, be immensely important. The task of the leaders of religion is to know what elements in a youth movement are auxiliary to the true spiritual end of man and what elements are contrary to it. When this has become clear, there is the strongest case for the provision of opportunities of united Christian worship which will bring to the movement the religious inspiration which it needs.

THE FUTURE OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Another question of immediate urgency is the future of the Public Schools. Many of them are already in parlous conditions and all are facing a dark and uncertain future. I have a letter on this subject from one of our members who writes: "What *is* the question in regard to the future of the public schools? It is doubtful whether the right question has yet been asked in any clear and unmistakable form. To frame the question rightly gives us a good deal of the answer. It is not one of just "saving" the public schools, if that means the preservation of all or most of them in their existing form. Nor is it a question of "bring them into the national system," unless we have already asked and answered the question why we want them in the national system at all.

"The essential question is quite simply "What do we want public schools *for*?" What genuine and paramount educational values do they embody which are not so fully realised in any other institution and which are capable of generalisation for the benefit of the nation at large? If there are no such values why spend time and effort in preserving what we can very well do without? The only conceivable excuse for such preservation would then be the continuation of class privilege and of a lopsided social dualism for England such as are not likely to be tolerated in our post-war society.

"There are those who deny the presence of unique educational values and would therefore be ready to let the schools die out as the unwanted relics of a dead régime.

"I believe that the public schools do embody genuine and unique educational values which we should be the poorer for losing. If this is so, there are three essential points on which our thinking must concentrate:

- (a) the defining of these elements of unique value;
- (b) the disentanglement of them in our thought from the accretions and accidents of social privilege that do so much to warp and distort our judgment on the purely educational issues;

(c) the extent to which these values can be generalised and made widely available to large sections of the population. It may be, for instance, that some of the peculiar virtues are bound up with the boarding system and are not capable of realisation apart from it. Or, again, it may be that their achievement requires a rate of expenditure per head that would be out of the question for more than a relatively small section of the people. Even so, is it sensible to destroy fine things just because everybody cannot enjoy them? "

These last remarks raise one of the major issues which we have to face in connection with a new order of society. It is the issue between a mechanical interpretation of equality and a fine and vital passion for *quality*. We may grant wholeheartedly that capacity to achieve fineness of quality is no monopoly of a class or perquisite of a large income. It is also true that, as things are, many who possess the capacity are debarred from fulfilment of it. But these indubitable truths must not be allowed to destroy our valuation of quality itself.

" FREEDOM IS IN PERIL "

That the war has to be fought on *two* fronts is becoming an intensely live issue. There is accumulating evidence of attempts to suppress and penalise private opinion which certain persons find distasteful. This is a form of social persecution totally at variance with the kind of society for the sake of which we are seeking to rid the world of Nazi tyranny.

The City Council of York, on July 29, passed a resolution terminating the services of all employees who are either registered as conscientious objectors or have declared themselves to be such. The Sheriff who moved the resolution explained in an interview that the terms were intentionally drawn so as to include not only those liable for military service, but all persons of whatever age who hold conscientious objections to war. Similar action is being widely taken throughout the country.

Public resentment against those who refuse military service being allowed to enjoy larger rewards or greater comfort than those who accept it is understandable. A community engaged in war is entitled to protect itself against activities which would interfere with its war effort. Powers have been taken to do this, and the proper authorities can be relied on to hold subversive activities in check.

But the limits of what is right and proper are overstepped when there is interference with private opinions quite apart from their public expression, more particularly when they have to do with questions of conscience. A clear distinction must be made between holding certain opinions and the public propagation of them in ways contrary to the public interest. Moreover the control of the latter, where it is necessary, ought to be through the regular processes of law and not through private victimisation.

The freedom of the individual to follow truth and obey his conscience belongs to his nature as a being responsible to God. It is also essential to the health of society. A society can avoid becoming stereotyped only through the freedom of individuals to differ from the dominant opinion. Because this freedom is vital, it needs to be safeguarded with special care in war time, when war hysteria is apt to lead to the penalising of all unpopular opinions. War hysteria is a monster to be controlled, not humoured like a dictator. The fact that we dislike or disagree with certain opinions is no ground for persecuting those who hold them.

Public opinion can become as obnoxious a dictator as any Government. The attempts which are growing on every hand to make victims of those who hold unpopular opinions have to be strenuously resisted. They undermine our cherished British tradition of toleration, good humour and fair play. They also constitute a public danger, since they inevitably raise in the minds of many the question whether we

are sincere about the ends for which we are fighting. Their effect is thus to weaken the national cause.

THE NEWS-LETTER

In order that I may get some holiday, my friend Mr. T. S. Eliot has agreed with characteristic generosity to be responsible for the next three issues of the News-Letter. These will appear over his name. He has been one of a small group who, since the News-Letter was started, have met weekly to advise about each number. I could not have got on at all without them. Mr. Eliot is thus thoroughly familiar with the past of the News-Letter and its general plan.

A good many of our members have in recent letters expressed a desire that the News-Letter should give a more definite lead in regard to action. Here are two samples which came last week. One is from a friend of long standing, who has recently retired from a position of influence filled with great distinction. He writes:

"You, and others in the Supplements, have often stressed the necessity of Christian reconstruction. I have felt that the analysis of present conditions has been very penetrating, and the urgency of new development on Christian lines very cogently put. But one is left with a sense of vagueness and a want of detail. What steps are there that the ordinary man can take? I am sure that many people are feeling a blank here, and if you could do anything to fill it up it would be a great help to them."

The other letter is from one of the younger clergy. He tells me of a meeting of a group of his young people, who after studying C.N.-L. No. 37 exclaimed with one voice "If only he would *lead* us in the crusade." The writer pleads with me to be more definite and explicit about what we must do. "Why not now? Are you not a little inclined to wait for a full barrel before pouring out the oil? Perhaps the widow (1 Kings XVII) has something to teach the News-Letter. Go to it. It all depends on you. The matter is urgent. Time is not on our side. We must not miss this 'bus.'"

These are not appeals to which I can turn a deaf ear. I had thought of saying something in this letter in response to the challenge. But it needs more space than is available this week and perhaps more than one letter. I shall, therefore, leave what I have to say till after my holiday. In the meantime there is plenty to stimulate thought in this week's Supplement by the Archbishop of York.

DOUBLE OUR MEMBERSHIP

Since many of our friends have said how much they would value a spare News-Letter, this week a duplicate copy is being sent to each member. Will you put it back in its envelope and readdress it to a friend with a personal note of introduction from yourself? In this way, you will enable many potential subscribers to judge it for themselves. Can you spare the time to give us this practical help? It would be much appreciated. The response of every member could double our membership at one stroke.

Yours very sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.

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BEGIN NOW

My dear Oldham,

Many recent events have led me to believe that we have reached a turning point in connexion with everything for which the Christian News-Letter stands. First, of course, there is the crisis in world events. If we are to rise to the test of the present and the opportunity for which we hope in the future, there must be a rapid crystallisation of much that is now fluid in Christian sentiment and aspiration. Secondly, the C.N.-L. has secured over 10,000 subscribers, which at once provides a constituency to which appeal can be made. Thirdly, I have had very recently the experience of attending meetings of different people who had all been led to a similar conviction.

You have analysed the situation pretty often. I do not think we need much more analysis. We need two things: a gathering together of the great mass of Christian sentiment which undoubtedly exists, and the direction of this towards some definite goal. It may be desirable to indicate at once the kind of goal that I have in mind. In general terms it may be defined as international and social justice. But, of course, everyone subscribes to that. It is indispensable that someone should take the risk of more detailed proposals.

Here we inevitably enter upon controversial ground. But the time for pure generalities is past, and someone must take the responsibility of being more particular.

I am not now concerned with any immediate settlement after the war, but with the goal to which we should hope to move. Broadly, this may be described as equal freedom for all nations, equal access to raw materials, equal opportunities of developing both material resources and human capacities. That will not be achieved by mere *laissez-faire*. Freedom in this world is a product of law and of the force which law

directs to the prevention of violence and tyranny. So we must work for the end of international anarchy and the establishment of international law, made and upheld by an international authority. In other words, one form or another of Federalism must be our goal. And we can urge our own nation at once to repudiate the claim to be judge in its own cause as a first step towards the federal goal.

THE PROFIT MOTIVE

But I do not believe that a federal system can of itself secure justice or even abolish war, unless the economic life of men is ordered on principles more expressive of fellowship than at present. The trend towards war is inherent in the internal economy of the modern nation. The essential evil in the ordering of European life has been the inversion of the proper relations between finance, production and consumption. It is evident that the real object for which goods are produced is that they may be enjoyed; and this in most instances means "consumed." The consumer is the factor of primary importance, whose interest ought to be decisive, for his is the only truly human interest in the whole process. Yet food is destroyed while men are hungry. Why? Because they have not the means to make their need constitute a market. So the primary aim of producing food turns out to be in practice, not feeding the hungry, but making a profit. The profit-motive has become the dominant motive. It is this which has led to the sacrilegious sacrifice of rural England to urban interests and subjects it to policies framed for urban conditions. It has turned man into an economic animal.

This leads to a competition for markets, which was comparatively harmless so long as the market was expanding with no visible

limit. But that is no longer so. Now the predominance of the profit-motive as the mainspring of industry leads to dangerous rivalries, which often contain the threat of war. It is perfectly true that few, if any, industrialists desire war; it is true that for most forms of business war itself is a source of loss rather than profit. It is not the policy of the industrialists, but the principle on which industry is organised, which has a tendency towards war.

Moreover, the system shows signs of ceasing to work. It is unable to provide employment, and therewith the basis for honourable life, to an alarmingly large number of citizens. Even now there are three-quarters of a million unemployed in Great Britain, though all younger men, apart from those in reserved occupations, have been "called up" and production of munitions is being pressed forward. And an expert writing in *The Times* tells us that we are now near the minimum figure! There are people who want to work and cannot work, because they cannot be "profitably employed." Profitably to whom? That their work might be profitable to the nation and to themselves there is no doubt.

If we are to dethrone the profit-motive from its predominance, how is this to be done? Sir Richard Acland proposes universal communal ownership. That might make matters worse; there would have to be an immense bureaucracy, and human egoism would find its outlet in laying hold of the levers of the bureaucratic machine. On the other hand, effective Distributivism is impracticable. It is indeed desirable that every citizen should hold some property. But we cannot put the clock back, and mass-production, which supplies the people at large as they never were supplied before, is come to stay. It is probably unwise to attempt any sketch of an ultimate ideal; but we can indicate some steps to be taken in the period just before us.

FIRST STEPS

(1) *Whenever limitation of liability is granted it should be accompanied by limitation of profits.* Surplus profits should be payable into various funds: (a) an equalization fund for the maintenance of wages at a standard rate in bad times; (b) a similar

equalization fund for profits; (c) a sinking fund for the repayment of capital lent or "invested"; (d) a fund for the extension of fixed capital; (e) a public service fund to be administered as a rule by representatives of the workers (including management) and of the national State or Local Authority.

(2) *The principle of the Mosaic Law of Jubilee should be applied.* It is perfectly ludicrous that because someone lent money for the building of (say) the Great Western Railway, he should become possessed of a saleable right to levy a private tax upon that railway for ever, and that this should pass from hand to hand by process of inheritance or sale as if it were a commodity. Shares should either be "debentures" and repayable at a certain date, or should, after bearing interest for a period of (say) fifty years lose x per cent. of their capital value every year until they are extinguished. Of course, the type of enterprise, degree of risk, delay in returns upon outlay, and similar factors must be taken into account in determining the maximum profit in any case, the period during which the capital sum remains intact, the rate of interest, and the rate of its decrease after that period.

(3) *The contribution of labour, whether managerial, administrative or manual, must, equally with the contribution of capital, and with still fuller right, carry a title to representation on the Board of Directors.* The investor gets his interest; the workman gets his wages. There is no reason why the former should also get control and the latter should not. It is on the whole more reasonable that Labour should hire capital than that Capital should hire labour, because capital can exist without capitalists, but labour cannot exist without labourers. But neither is altogether reasonable. The two are alike necessary and should share the control, so long as the concern is making any use of investments earning interest.

These principles can be applied piecemeal and with infinite degrees of variety. In some cases, perhaps in many, something resembling a guild system or Fascist corporation would be established. It would, of course, be essential for the avoidance of the special evils of the Fascist system that the right of free association should be maintained. It would be worth while to

enquire how far the evil sting of Fascism would be drawn and its other economic arrangements found mainly good, if Trade Unions continued to exist, and especially if the representation on the management of corporations were through independent Trade Unions. It would certainly transform the actual Fascist system in vital ways.

RECOVERY OF THE NATURAL ORDER

The object of all these proposals is to reverse the reversal of the "natural order" which is characteristic of our phase of civilisation. The "natural order" is that consumption should control production, and that production should control finance. This order has during the last century and a half been completely inverted.

It is evident that my proposals imply an authority giving sanction to each scheme. That authority must be charged with the responsibility of seeing that all needs are reasonably met and that no glut of commodities is created: in other words, it must "plan" our economic life.

These proposals are put forward as perhaps offering the maximum application of the twin principles of Freedom and Order—Personality and Fellowship—in an age of machinery and mass-production. Whether my actual proposals are the best for this purpose, or even good for it at all, I leave to more expert judges to decide; but that is the purpose which Christian citizens must pursue.

But we shall pursue it successfully only if we do this as part of the recovery of the natural order throughout life. We shall not succeed in subordinating the economic to the truly human unless we subordinate the human to the divine. Humanism, so right in the qualities which it admires and consciously cultivates, is devoted to an impossible enterprise unless it be grounded in Theism which it has so often repudiated or regarded as indifferent. Man can be saved from mechanism only by devotion to God.

A CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Mr. T. S. Eliot (in whose *Idea of a Christian Society*, as in the writings of the

blessed Paul, "are some things hard to be understood," and I fear that I may be "ignorant and unstedfast" and therefore "wrest them to my own destruction") has taught us to distinguish between "the community of Christians" and a "Christian community." Our first appeal is to the former; but if they are to establish the latter, they must call in a great multitude of those whose religious position is that of a stoic Theism with a strongly Christian tinge. This is immensely common in our country. These folk, who come to Church on a National Day of Prayer and perhaps for a Harvest Thanksgiving, possess something of enormous potential value. Their faith in God as righteous ruler of the world is very real, and when they fall back on it they find in it real strength and support. But they use it for support; they find in it little of fresh impulse. Moreover, though the understanding of God's righteousness is coloured by the Christian doctrine that God is Love—sometimes understood in terms of sentiment rather than of purpose—there is little or no apprehension of the essential Christian Gospel of the Incarnation and Atonement, that God "hath visited and redeemed His people."

What, in face of the urgency of the world's need, is the "community of Christians" to do in this situation? We need to call so many of this marginal fringe as will respond into a Christian fellowship consisting of both these and of those fully committed members of Christian Churches who will join. Thus would be formed a great inter-denominational fellowship containing many who, though not yet committed to the Christian faith, were ready to join in seeking the Christian solution of our problems and doing what might be in their power to act on what they find.

You have urged the readers of the C.N.-L. to come together in their various districts and consider what needs and opportunities there are for the manifestation of Christian brotherhood and service, especially in their own neighbourhood, and to take what steps are possible to set the congregations acting to these ends. That, wherever it happens, will provide a nucleus of the Christian fellowship that we need. There is one city where the Anglican and Free Church leaders

have addressed a joint letter to the Church workers of all denominations to do their utmost to carry on their work with a full sense of fellowship with all the others, and also asking them to come to a meeting where they had the opportunity to pledge themselves to promote Christian fellowship in the city and to help in whatever way they can. The aim is that these may form groups or cells for exactly those purposes which you have urged upon your readers.

Now if all this is to catch fire so as to burn up the dead wood with which we are encumbered and supply energy for a forward movement, two things are needed, together with some such interpretation of international and social justice as has been attempted earlier in this letter.

BASIS OF CO-OPERATION.

(1) There is need for a statement of the basis on which we invite people to join together. This must be specifically Christian, but should insist only on those parts of the Christian faith which are essential for the interpretation of these times. It is not proposed that all who join should already assent to this statement; what would be asked of them would be a desire to explore the Christian way as indicated by the statement, and act when possible on their conclusions.

The statement now offered was drawn up at a group consisting of Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, and Friends, and had the assent of them all. Here it is.

DOOM. DELIVERANCE. UNITY.

God reigns. That is the fundamental truth. From heaven He reigns—creator and upholder of the world. From the Cross He reigns—making defeat itself the stuff of His triumph. From the heart of His people He reigns—extending His rule by the energy of His love constraining them.

Accordingly:—

(i) We recognise in the troubles and

anxieties of this time a just doom—the consequence, according to God's laws, of our neglect of His command and defiance of His will.

(ii) We acknowledge Christ as absolute Lord of Life and Saviour from the sin which brings these evils upon the world. We pledge ourselves and call our fellows to penitence for the past and to new loyalty for the future. Especially we confess our acquiescence in social injustice and national jealousies; and we dedicate ourselves to the establishment of economic and international justice and fellowship.

(iii) We declare that in this allegiance to Jesus Christ we are united to all others who acknowledge Him, in a fellowship which is unbroken by any earthly divisions and persists beneath even the wraths of war. In this unity in Christ we have both the hope of peace in this world and the foretaste of eternal life in fellowship with God.

A SIGN OF MEMBERSHIP.

(2) There is also need for a means by which those who join up may recognise one another. This might perhaps best be achieved by the wearing of some kind of badge or symbol. But a means of knowing fellow-members is essential to the spontaneous growth of the fellowship.

I picture a great multitude of folk, mostly young, belonging to all denominations and to none, challenged by that statement and responding to it at least so far as to test its truth in practice. I picture them growing on the principle of the snowball, one drawing another in. I picture them meeting in their cells or groups, learning more and more to hear the Gospel in its fullness, catching fire and kindling others, till overleaping all our divisions there is a Christian fellowship "afame with faith" and ready as true disciples of Christ must always be to turn the world upside down.

Yours ever,

WILLIAM EBOR:

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